# A CROSS-CULTURAL VIEW OF EGO DYNAMICS*

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THE cross-cultural approach to the study of personality has been with us now for several decades, and the development of a systematic ego psychology for about the same period. It seems to me, however, that the two viewpoints, which need to be intimately acquainted with one another, have as yet only a speaking acquaintance, and that an hour may well be devoted to an attempt to show how the study of culture may further enrich our understanding of ego dynamics.

## ADAPTATION

I shall begin with my own version of a psychology of adaptation. To adapt, one must act. When adaptation to the environment is adequate, one may for a moment rest on one's oars. It is typical of life and of civilization to allow only momentary resting places of this sort.

Any psychology concerned with adaptation in any of its forms must view the cognitive life in terms of effort and adjustment; it must see the endless, restless process of searching and seeking as the eyes, or the head, or the trunk turn, sway, recoil, and again come to confront the changing demands of the environmental situation. If the skilled manual system or the locomotor system are required to assist in the act, they do but bring out more clearly the fact that one is not waiting for the environment to lay down the laws of adaptation but rather is constantly advancing to find what may be required; is constantly selecting in terms of needs, preparing to ward off dangers, readying oneself for the inscrutable future. To adapt to environment with too little challenge and to prescribe too constant a repertory of environmental responses means not only torpor and stagnation but elimination from the struggle and from the joys of active life.

We begin then with emphasis upon attentive selection, upon the con-

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stant pressure of the organism to bring its receptors and its sensory and motor systems into contact with what is or what is likely to be presented. Here we may mobilize the developments in contemporary experimental psychology that show so clearly that perceiving can no longer be conceived as a way of registering the environment, as upon a photographic plate or a receptive tape, but rather must be perpetually conceived in terms of an active process that involves both selection and rejection.[1] Here we have the massive force of the studies of figure and ground that show, as demonstrated by the classical experiments of Rubin,[2] that there are definite laws by which some of the materials in the perceptual world force themselves into a central position and relegate all else to a relatively undifferentiated background. Sometimes the immediate satisfactions involved in such materials are dominant, symbolizing what it is that we need at the moment. Sometimes deeper habits and defensive operations play a larger role in determining what is to become figure. But in all processes of adaptation to the environment there is active selection. There is, at the same time, as the recent volume by Diamond[3] and his collaborators so well shows, a perpetual and relentless process of exclusion or rejection or inhibition, the physiological dynamics of which are now rather well understood, making the inhibitory processes just as real, central, and fundamental for life as the positive selective processes.

It follows that with this mutual selection and rejection of stimulus materials, there must be a high degree of patterning of these selected objects. What will in time become the foci of major object relations, in the richest sense, will be first those objects that get above the necessary threshold for adaptive attention, those capable of having a figure role in the figure-ground situation. Modern work such as that of Berlyne[4] on curiosity motivation makes it reasonably certain that curiosity satisfactions—the satisfactions related to novelty, to strangeness, to incompatibility with what is present in the field of awareness—exert a marked force to produce coherence or system in the things selected. At the same time, those objects that actually work together functionally, those that have an immediate practical value in the life of the observer, tend likewise to hang together. Gestalt psychologists have said that experiences that have a "common fate" tend to form patterns. All this "grist to the mill," however different its origin, form, or even taste, will tend, so to speak, to be milled, processed and, in the end, accepted

as part of one aspect of life. Thus in the sorting test of Marjorie Bolles, all objects may be grouped together by the patient if they serve a common purpose; they are things you could wear to a wedding or, in another mood, they are things with which you could kill yourself. There is a functional value not only in the surface similarity factor in grouping together the constellations of experience, but in membership in a common act. The executive functions of the ego arise partly in this way.

## Personality and Culture

From the field work of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead and from the analytic studies of Abram Kardiner and Erik Erikson, to whom my indebtedness is obvious, I believe we can say that culture enters this picture in at least three ways: 1) since culture forms its own constellation of perceived objects, as we encounter words, faces, values, the miscellany of the daily patterned world of our experience, there are many ready-made stimulus patterns that do not need much further reworking; 2) since culture determines many of the goals and subgoals for which man must live, the objects around him will be grouped in terms of their service toward these goals; 3) since culture determines means as well as goals, it will arrange together the various behaviors that serve this ends-means relationship. There are, then, at least three ways in which the environment that confronts us can no longer remain merely a physical or geographical environment, but becomes a psychological environment imposed upon us by preformed structures as well as goals and by means-ends relationships. We ourselves as individuals in our own attentive and selective responses play a major role, but the rules of the game according to which we play are largely given by the cultural requirements. A point on which we may differ from some contemporary social-science definitions of this process has to do with the so-called universal molding of the individual; we may insist rather upon the active and perpetual assertiveness of the individual within the broad possibilities that culture allows. There are dyed-in-the-wool conformists; but with others there is relatively little passive, plastic adaptation and a very large amount of battling with the environment, both in its human form and in its geographical form. We accept the human rules but we work out, as well as we may, a pattern of figure and ground according to which our own perceptual world may be managed. We must yield

on many points; yet we want to see it, order it, shape it in our own way.

Yet the degree of activity that the individual child mobilizes in his confrontation of the culture is in turn largely dependent on the nature of the tasks before him. Are they tasks worth tackling; differentiations worthy of a close look; cognitive achievements that get somewhere? I believe there is now overwhelming evidence from the work of Jean Piaget and J. McV. Hunt that intelligence grows as it is used; that stimulus deprivation and cultural deprivation are two aspects of the same thing; that any subculture that gives the child nothing intensely interesting to use his brains on will produce not constant IQ's but declining IQ's. Such an affectively deprived environment becomes also a cognitively deprived environment. This applies to race and economic class but goes much further. In the endless discussion of sex differences, for example, there has been an astonishing blind spot on the part of male psychologists as to what actual nourishment is provided for gifted girls, who in the latency or early adolescent years have a serious yen to go somewhere. The Soviet Union, Israel, and even upper classes in India make far more use of women in medical, legal, political, administrative, and other high level fields than does the United States. How idle it is to go on debating sex differences in the abstract when the first experiment called for would extend our existing knowledge regarding the terrific neglect of feminine ego potentials. One of the main psychoanalytic contributions to our culture would consist of strengthening the male to a point where he no longer feels he has to disparage and limit the female.

## Ecology

But this means that we must attempt to define the term "environment." We have spoken as if the environment consisted of objects, specifically persons, animals, trees, words, numbers, values, all capable of dictionary definitions and having a place in a cognitive system. The environment, however, in which your patients live and in which you yourselves live is not a collection of objects with this degree of neutrality; these are, as David Kahn has expressed the matter to me, objects that are heavily loaded and invested with what may be called affective charges, energies, investments, need-press themas, canalizations, or imprintings. They are heavily colored by your own inner demands and fears, hopes, rages, amusements, and whimsies. When you cast your eye

about you, you can hardly find in this room, or in New York, or in the world at large, anything that possesses the objective and affectless properties of sheer "thinghood." One of your patients may like to carve chessmen from ebony in very unusual forms. As from a distance you see the board, you are uncertain which of his odd figures represents a knight, which a rook; you are not at home in this situation until you have loaded the situation, so to speak, with the qualities of knighthood, bishopness, and rookness, and perceived what is knight, what is bishop, what is rook, and how all this fits into the relation with king, queen, and pawn; then you have properly loaded the human situation, not only with facts but with values, and you understand the specific game of chess that is going on. This is precisely the situation through which a visitor from India or Japan views Manhattan Island, or a Long Island beach, or a Wyoming dude ranch, until he has been given the cognitive, affective, motor equipment to inject color and meaning into all of the objects.

In fact, the child's coloring book is a very suitable image for us to use here. The tiny child may give the wrong colors to objects; his red grass and brown sky may bother us until we realize that he has to start from color if he is to start with reality at all, and that the process of growth into the culture consists largely of attenuating or enriching or modifying the colors, or rearranging the color combinations. It is the world soaked in color that is the real world, the world fully giving us the affectively loaded meanings that we have imposed.

A large share in this affective loading, of course, has been rigged by our forebears, or by the cultural requirements as a whole. But as I have noted, we have ourselves played some part in this and, in any event, it is our own emotions with which we are now dealing. The central point is that the objects among which we select can never be viewed neutrally and since, in general, a large proportion of our investments are made for good, and are not recoverable, we are, for better or for worse, stuck with a system of coloration that forever constitutes the individually toned world in which we live. Here, you see, I am gently rejecting the view that we see the world through our own colored glasses. Momentarily, we may do something like that, but the image is very unsatisfactory for various reasons. You can take off your colored glasses, or (as in the brilliant experiments of Ivo Kohler[5]) you can study a flight of varying colors that may follow after various kinds of

glasses are removed. But these are temporary effects based upon experimentable and therefore changeable conditions. For the most part, you and I have developed much too profound and inextinguishable, active patterns of investment.

The result is, you see, that I am shifting the world of psychological reality to the cultural environment. It is no longer you, but your cultural environments that are rich in color. To be sure, it all started with events in your insides, but those events led to investments carrying you deeper and deeper, more and more unrecoverably into the world, the world that no longer has the little contours of your own inner affective life. You are no longer dealing merely with your familiar feelings, coiled and snugly rolled within your own visceral interior. You are, on the contrary, dealing with a world out there that now possesses incalculably rich personal, subpersonal, superpersonal, meanings. The trouble with you, so to speak, is out there. This becomes very obvious if, like Lois Murphy,[6] you study small children in Kansas with the expectation that they will see the toys and games of their environment according to the general three-dimensional patterns familiar through working with children in the city of New York and in Westchester County. In Kansas, when children are tested with miniature life toys, they do not just see different toys; they come into Kansas rooms; they not only see with Kansas eyes, but see Kansas things. Perhaps this begins with the fact that it is the bull that is exciting, not the fire engine. Margaret Lowenfeld's[7] projective test, known as the world technique, brings out not only idiosyncratic differences in impulse control, but differences in basic ways in which one selects, rejects, arranges, and integrates.

It has recently been our good fortune to have a small opportunity to observe differences in the way in which the world of time and space is managed by the peoples of Japan, India, and the Soviet Union. On the fragmentary scale from which our observations were made, I offer no certain conclusions, but I want to share with you a fact long ago brought out by David Efron[8] in the study of Italian and Jewish groups in the city of New York, namely that the structure of space within the community leads to different spatial definition of the body, and of its gestures and forms of expression. A less rigidly structured space and time in Kansas means that the miniature life toys situation is seen differently from the way it is seen in New York. To the Kansas

children, living in less crowded and less regimented space, an open-ended situation is a situation to *explore*, while the New York children settle down immediately within a limited space to *organize* the toys. So too, the crowding in Japan, and the cosmic time scale in India, alter even the geometrical relations to which we are ordinarily addicted. The world of action also molds perceptual space. In The Menninger Foundation, McNamara and Fisch[9] found that optical illusions in left-handed persons differ considerably from those in right-handed persons; the vertical post, the movement of which is incorrectly perceived in the left half of the visual space of the left-handed person, is subject to the same effect when it appears in the right half of the visual space of the right-handed person. Finding that age, sex, and handedness all needed to be controlled in this illusion, we added to our sample by advertising in a Kansas university paper for "left-handed Freshman girls." As William Stern[10] has pointed out, the psychological space of each individual reflects his motor equipment and, to some degree, left-handers actually see things differently from their right-handed colleagues.

My emphasis is upon the world of coloring or affective loading of the particular person, animal, object, or whatnot, that impinges vigorously as figure in the figure-ground experience of the little child. Whether, as some have suggested, this is related to imprinting, and because the imprinted object gives a moment's respite from the anxiety of a bleak and unfamiliar world, I shall not attempt to say; but I *will* seek to emphasize the fact that all of these experiences of early affective impact upon the young and plastic individual tend to grow large in importance if they mediate other values or protect from other dangers. Thus, for example, if there is imprinting of the sound of the mothers' heartbeat, as Dr. Salk's[11] studies suggest, this would mean provision for a broader and broader safety. As one finds many reminders of all that is associated with this sound in life, there will be broadening areas of safety and broadening areas of positive satisfaction. Such stable objects of investment make the whole environment more safe, more familiar, and more gratifying.

## The Self

I turn now to the world of the self. The self-image begins by being part of the outer world insofar as one sees one's body, hears one's voice,

makes tactual contact with one's skin and, through long processes of association, connects experiences such as warmth and cold both with the outer and with the inner world, thereby making a bridge from one world to the other. It will not help us very much to say that there is, from the beginning, an inner world of warm and cold, organic sensation, and proprioceptive input from striated muscles, unless one is willing to concede that in the tiny child this inner world is not well differentiated from the outer world. There must, in fact, be gradual seeking and recognition of inner realities, on the analogy of the outer world. We learn something about the structure and time-space relationships of the outer world, and crudely try to visualize what is going on inside. We may speak of memory as if it were spatially something installed within our tissues. But in reality we study the world of memories in terms of their ability to reproduce the world seen out there in the environment. Memories are spread out in space and time, and we test them to see if they can be tied to what we know about the time-space world that we have studied in geometric and physical terms.

And we scan the inner world essentially as we scan the outer world. One of the problems we are striving to clarify in the laboratory at The Menninger Foundation is how it comes about that one can transfer the well-learned scanning habits of every day to the inner world of organic sensation of feeling, of memory, and whatever else we see fit to call "inner." Can a person, by training in estimating distances, for example, or training in evaluating the passage of time, or the path of a zigzagging moving object, learn anything useful about how to scan, observe, and specify the events within the skin? One might, at first, be inclined to say: How in the world could he do so, since the events are of a totally different character? Actually, the world of memory is supposed to be something of a chart with time-space specifications somewhat like those of the original experiences; otherwise they could not serve effectively as memories. Learning to observe and report perceptual responses may help train one to report memories.

In the same way, it may well be that learning finer and finer differentiation, learning to pick apart detail as this is applied, let us say, to auditory experiences with music or with human conversation, may enable us to pick apart inner experiences representing input from the vital organs or the striped muscles. I am sure that under different nomenclature you are, as analysts, frequently concerned with exactly

this process of inner scanning and disentangling the components that need to be observed. There is a need to permit a figure-ground differentiation that needs to be understood in terms of the affective loading and all the other machinery that influences the external stimulus worlds. Why is not the inner stimulus world just as capable of systematic study, and why are not the relations of the outer to the inner world likewise capable of being effectively bridged by a study of cross-connections and communication? Soviet psychologists such as K. M. Bykov[12] with their emphasis upon intero- and proprioceptive conditioning have long been doing something very similar to this. Beginnings were made in the same tradition by the Norwegian Trygve F. Braatoy and, more recently, by Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman[13] in the United States.

These studies all appear to have vindicated the view that the culture can be wholly brought within the individual, and that the individual can be wholly brought within the culture, in a form as radical as any isomorphism that a neorealist or a Gestalt psychologist might desire. If the question is whether we should investigate the outer *macroscopic* world, where everything is spelled out for the eye and ear to take in, or the inner *microscopic* world where the intricate complexities of introspection and psychoanalytic technique are required even to push slowly through reinforced concrete, the answer would seem to be that the false opposition of the outer and inner is making most of the trouble. But though the content of the outer world is largely one with the content of the inner world, there is a tremendous difference: the outer world, as I have suggested, is largely an *orderly* world. For according to the thesis that I offer you in these pages, the culture has taken over the color of the inner world, and therefore a student of coloring, whether he be only a house painter or a Leonardo da Vinci, can find in the environment, indeed in a specific personal reaction with the subcultural environment of the individual, the story and the texture of his life investments; and the sociologist or anthropologist can, if he sees fit to adopt the necessary tools, find within the individual the color scheme and the exact utilization of pigments that the constructors of the culture have used. But the inner world is less orderly, more tumultuous.

In his charming book, *The Uses of the Past*, H. J. Muller[14] of Indiana University, describes how the huge building stones of St. Sophia's Church in Istanbul, Turkey, show, upon close inspection, the

little figurines and scribblings with which the workers of more than a thousand years ago amused themselves, introducing here and there little cartoons of current figures, just as Roger Bacon's 13th-century manuscripts show the delightful little thumbing of the nose that the priests of that day directed against their superiors. So we find in our dreams the nose-thumbing, the Bronx-cheering, not only of the conscious individual directed at his social superiors, but the dream directed against the dreamer himself. The disorderly principle makes fun, so to speak, of the orderly principle as high rationality "gets the gate." For in the very nature of human life there must be order in culture, and there must be disorder in the individual; and the coming to terms of one with the other that we call education, or sometimes psychotherapy, must encounter the color scheme of the hidden world within and show how it is related to the deeply ingrained coloring of the surrounding ecology. But I am arguing, you see, that when we allow for order and disorder, we shall find the same things inside that we find outside, and vice versa. Of course, it takes a certain skill to find and match them. Carolyn Wells has rescued from oblivion a choice visual image of this inside-outside relationship: after he slew the great bear, Hiawatha made himself mittens from the skin. Then: "He, to get the warm side inside, Put the inside skin side outside; . . . That's why he put the fur side inside, Why he turned them inside outside."[15]

A cross-cultural conception of the ego is then a conception of the process by which the primal interaction of inner warmth and outer coldness has brought warmth to the outside world without robbing the inner world of any of its perennial high temperature.

But what about culture conflict? It is my thesis that cultures must conflict because they have different figure-ground organizations. Their values and their means-end relations are different; therefore to be a member of more than one cultural group is to be rich in inner conflicts. Furthermore, because of cultural lag, most of us are members of contemporary, 1964 culture, while we are also members of 19th-century Western and other cultures. The conflict is right there in the daily situation, not just in ourselves. One moves within this complex situation and is like the chameleon on the Scotch plaid that tried to adapt to all things and burst in the effort. Culture conflict is built right into the self.

But is there no escape? There is one escape, yes: namely, the discovery of common features in different cultural settings, so that they

can be verbally and otherwise equated, allowing the nonoverlapping components to serve as ground in the figure-ground pattern. In your analytic practice you do this kind of integrating, this kind of selecting from diverse cultural settings all the time. I am suggesting that you can do it, so to speak, environmentally just as well as you do it intrapsychically; in fact, that you are doing both all the time, without being wholly clear that you are doing so. Therapy, as well as education, must find figure components that can be cognitively apprehended as having some degree of integrity and also some degree of potential satisfying value for the person. These components must resonate to the inner as well as to the ecological world. The dominant self must be the figure selected among the many selves that are encountered, and it must be both a good self, from the point of view of the person and of his cultural surroundings, and also a self capable of holding its dominant relation with regard to the competing components in the ground.

But if my present thesis is at all sound, you will gain by doing much more cultural analysis than you are now doing. You will find more and more cultural components in the shy, little hiding self that loves to pretend that it is a granite totality, and much more self-quality in the environment, which loves to pretend that it is basically ego-alien. Instead of the game being limited to a study of peripheral factors of personality, the game will be most productive when you direct your efforts to the self. I mean the self-image and self-concept, all that is consciously, preconsciously, or unconsciously serving as the central reference axis of life. This is where the isomorphism of outer and inner will be richest. This, if you are cross-culturally oriented, will make your probing of the inner world most adequate.

## Culture and the Ego

In the effort to speak of the ego, we shall make sense only if its complicated structural origins and dynamics are considered. With the aim of showing how ego theory must be influenced by cross-cultural considerations, I shall indicate some of the aspects or components of the ego that are certainly highly responsive to cultural pressures of one sort or another.

I had a delightful opportunity years ago to listen to a hot though friendly argument between David Rapaport and Bela Mittelmann. Bela had indicated that there were at least five current uses of the term *ego*

in psychoanalysis. Rapaport had managed to indicate that a central unity could nevertheless be found. Mittelmann argued the point and in so doing brought the number of meanings of the term to seven. The meanings are, of course, all familiar to you. The more prominent ones are: reality testing, impulse control, executive control of the motor system, and control of defense operations. In the latter connection it becomes clear that the ego is both defender and defended. Behind all such considerations lies, of course, the theory of adaptation in the various uses of the term, and the theory of the action system, that is, the manner in which ego is related to id, and, of course, the theory of the self, or self image, or self concept; the cognitive content to which one responds when one responds to his own body or visual representation or voice, or whatever perceptual material one must apprehend, invest with feeling, and toward which one must orient.

Now, you see, I am developing the thesis that it is insufficient to talk about a cross-cultural definition of the ego, because the ego, to put it conservatively, is several different things.

Let me quote, for example, the remarks of an anthropologist now working on village family structure in Ghana, Africa. According to her, it is impossible to study mother-child dynamics among the people of Ghana without recognizing that every human relationship must be defined in status terms and, consequently, that children who have arrived in this world rather recently have thereby a very low status indeed. This means that nobody wants to talk to the anthropologist about children, because to talk about unimportant things is to make yourself unimportant. From this viewpoint, then, one encounters the statement that our Western society is, let us say, highly competitive. What can this possibly mean in terms of the children? Competitive with regard to status? Whatever their place in life, children in the United States enjoy enormous status by the simple empirical test that one talks about them, shows them off, pits them competitively against one another, loves, hates, rewards, attacks, fusses over, and tries to forget them but, certainly, one does not assign the Ghana type of low status to them. This will mean now that if we want to describe a cross-cultural view of the ego, it will make a great deal of difference whether we are talking about the status aspect or, let us say, about reality testing, impulse control, or whatnot.

On another occasion, I tried to develop the conception that com-

petitiveness in our society is usually competition for gain, power, or prestige. Some societies may compete largely for material gain; and, in some, material gain is unimportant but prestige is of vital concern while, in others, control of the power system is what is really important. Society may rig the competitive activities in terms of the goals for which the big rewards are assigned. I discovered, of course, in due time that this threefold classification of competitive goals had been thought of before. It was one of my Catholic students at Columbia University who drew to my attention the fact that St. Ignatius Loyola had said just this. Passing, however, from the sublime to the ridiculous, I also got a quick feedback in one of my classes at the New School for Social Research in New York, from a student who said that in the U.S. Army my threefold system was well understood in terms of "big shots," "hot shots," and "big-time operators." I decided rather arbitrarily that the big-time operators were the people competing for power, that the big shots were prestige hounds, and that the hot shots were those who sat on the moneybags. At any rate the essential point that people compete for different things and that prestige and status have different meanings in different cultural settings will mean that the ego, insofar as it is concerned with material and social reality, must reflect the aim, power, and prestige goals in each society and the means to such goals that society standardizes.

A severe ego conflict could arise, for example if, within the culture of the wheat farmers of Kansas or the stockbrokers of Manhattan, one were to give maximal emphasis to prestige competition, yet at the same time demand very severe and impossibly high levels of reality testing and of impulse control. One could thrust oneself vigorously into the competition, accepting the gain, power, and prestige terms of the contest, while still remaining capable of the reality testing and the impulse control that are effective in Wall Street or in the world of the grain elevators. One could thus suffer through repeated defeats from a badly fractured ego, although equally severe competitive strivings could prevail in other fields such as, let us say, psychology or literary criticism, in which the standards of effectiveness are rather vaguely specified. In these latter professions one is not called upon to look very effectively at oneself, and one can thus continue to maintain almost any level of self-evaluation that one likes without being roughly called to order by reality. Vaguely aware of this situation, psychologists have

often measured one another in terms of the number of their publications. The feeble reality-testing propensity of many a person is propitiated by ego and superego bribes that will work well in the particular society described. This kind of bribe would work very poorly indeed in a society such as Margaret Mead's people of Manus, in the Admiralty Islands where, in 1928, savagely severe reality testing and roughshod practical success in commercial adventure not only served to duplicate the Wall Street world that I have just mentioned, but pretty effectively ruled out the development of a class of people such as the poets, the literary critics, and the psychologists just mentioned. I hope I am making clear that there are not only different ego definitions in different cultures, but that the type of internal stress within the ego system will vary with the cultural setting.

## Wholeness

Pressing more specifically toward an answer to the question of the cultural aspects of the ego, we must assert that all of personality derives from multiple complex social sources, activating and potentiating the raw biological materials given each individual, and that we must be ready to show concretely how the multiple social origins interact in predetermining biological growth along particular lines. For it may well be asked why we insist on speaking of whole cultures and their interactions, rather than of the specific details, the specific family and individual interactions that can be directly observed in each life history. Indeed, why, if cultures are highly structured wholes, should we try to deal with the whole culture before we have developed competence in analyzing its details? The answer, as it is with regard to most works of art or of science, is that one must understand the whole in order to understand the particular. Since man has been man, there have been almost ceaseless conflicts—economic, political, and military—between highly structured cultural systems as each wave of migrating humanity encountered another resisting or counteracting wave. Assimilation and reorganization into new personality patterns has been the law of social life. This massive and structured interaction of whole cultures is the starting point for even personal encounters with culture. It goes on, moreover, in every Italian family in Boston studied by Drs. C. Kluckhohn and J. Spiegel, in which the Italian girl is confronted with the integral problem of remaining an Italian like her mother or

becoming an American like her peers and classmates. This totality of structure based upon profound and vital individual needs and values is the stuff of which personality conflict is composed. I do not deny that even in relatively homogeneous cultural settings there are intrafamilial conflicts, but I do state that when these conflicts are examined by the anthropologist or sociologist (who alone has the skills to observe them in microscopic detail) their broader outlines emerge. As Bronislaw K. Malinowski long ago pointed out, the meaning of any specific familiar pattern, like the Oedipus situation, must depend upon the value systems structured within the community as a whole; and if we are serious about the matter of understanding intrapsychic conflict, we shall have to look for it, not in the detail, but in the larger system. Exactly as if you were to understand a cadence in Beethoven, you will get relatively little from the physics of tone and a great deal from the life of Beethoven in Vienna and the romantic music of which he was a tumultuous expression.

Now if personality as a whole must be seen in these terms, with emphasis upon figure-ground organization, it follows that the core and substance of the personality organization that we call the ego must likewise be so seen in its context. If culture is a dynamic synthesis, and if personality within it is a dynamic synthesis, so the ego, too, is a dynamic synthesis; it is a synthesis of biologically and culturally defined needs and outlooks upon life that we call values. It is because of the integrity of the culture that personality can be defined as a structure within culture, and it is because of the integrity of the personality that ego can be defined as a structure within personality. The ego includes many diverse cultural components taking shape as the biological pressure of the individual seeks a point of resolution. It is a product of conflict from the very beginning, and Freud as biologist must be given the very fullest credit for continuously harping upon this point. If there were no conflict, there would be very little shaping to be done. Conflict arises from the fact that there are alternative modes of satisfying requirements, and these alternative modes are set up in different cultures in such fashion that to be a loyal member of one is to make one hopelessly disqualified for loyal membership in another.

The ways of dissolving conflicts likewise are largely defined in cultural terms. These terms we carry within ourselves, living out each day of our lives not the petty squabbles of a sibling rivalry alone, but

the massive squabbles between Greek and Roman attitudes toward life, Celtic and Germanic definitions of the romantic, Saxon and Norman conceptions of a noble man and a noble woman. It is only because these endlessly recurring cultural conflicts are incorporated within each one of us that we respond to the great literature that endlessly redefines the theme. If the Arthurian cycle, or *Hamlet*, or the story of Jacob and his ladder or of Aladdin and his lamp dealt only with local issues, they would have no place in the vast literary struggle to define the recurrent problems and resolutions that confront human needs.

I mean that the recognition of biological conflict channeled into cultural form must precede any further definition of what the ego is or may become. With the same stress, however, it is my obligation to make clear that there can be *resolution* precisely because, through eons of time, cultural wholes have found varying norms for the ideal man, the ideal woman; have found devices for reconciling conflict with some degree of consistency and integrity; and have given the mature person fit to live in a modern society a conception that more than local and fragmentary resolution of conflict is really possible. Inner harmony is an ideal which, from the Lord Buddha or from Socrates, has made the cultivation and education of the ego the supreme educational problem. An ego mature enough to recognize conflict and to accept a vision of life in which the role of figure is given to a strongly unified value, while the disparate and warring elements are left to a relatively shadowy part of the background, suggests that relative balance and serenity in living may be achieved. It would certainly seem to follow from this line of thought that identification with the parents and with the therapist will inevitably involve much conflict derived from cultural sources, unless by some near-miracle the therapist should himself be one of those ideal men or ideal women who have found this kind of conflict resolution and built it into a sturdy ego, have indeed built it in with such preternatural strength that each patient derives strength from it, without, as with the widow's cruse, taking anything from others who need it. But really, from the present viewpoint, the greatest problem is the way in which the therapist identifies, through his individual patient, with the historical humanity that lies there on the couch before him.

## Clinical Implications

At the end of such a presentation, one has a right to ask: Is there any possible way of ascertaining whether these conceptions that I offer you be grain or chaff? Yes, there are four ways of testing them, and they will all take much time. First, the way of systematic clinical comparison in which comparable data from different life histories, from different cultural settings, are ordered concurrently and compared, by any standard statistics, with comparable longitudinal material. We have a few working models. Having my own biases, I shall draw from Robert Wallerstein's model, attempting to compare systematically the lives of patients who have something in common in order to see whether the social factors in ego formation can begin to yield to such an attack as I have suggested. We are doing this the hard way because our patients come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultural dynamics are consequently blurred. Second, there is, of course, the ethnological method as used by the anthropologist and sociologist, including the newer methods being developed by systematic comparison of value patterns in different societies, with systematic ordering of material, and quantitative comparison of the sequences. Third, genetically, in the strict sense of the term, there is the intensive study of the earliest phases of ego formation in infancy and early childhood as the material is emerging in a number of longitudinal studies, such as those in New Haven, Conn., and in Topeka, Kans. Such studies, with sharpness of observation, discipline in the ordering of data, and consistent use of terminology should make possible the comparability of genetic sequences in different children in different parts of the United States or of the world. Obviously, all these methods must be combined and are being combined. I am rather obsessed by the Topeka results which Lois Murphy, Alice Moriarty, Povl Toussieng, Keith Bryant, Pat Schloesser, Joe Morgan, and others are bringing into structured form today: it is because I have actually seen this going on that I believe in it and have the hardihood to tell you that it can be done. Here, for example, the early infantile freedom from frustrations (as observed by Sibylle K. Escalona and her collaborators) is compared with the later capacity for perceptual clarity, as shown by independent and uncontaminated assessments; that is, the nonrestricted infants are found later to be relatively free from percept confusion. Ego dynamics are thus

brought into direct relation with early observable affective factors.

Finally, of course, there is the experimental method, boldest of all. This means the use of an independent variable, specified and controlled; it therefore means actual intervention. The therapist has the courage to introduce, when clinically required, particular types of interventions, keeping systematic records of the cases in which such intervention occurs, as well as control cases similar but not subject to the same act of intervention. This, too, can be done as the other methods mature and interact. The ultimate goal, the understanding of ego development, is worth the labor. I have tried thus far to contribute something to the clarification of concepts, but the major contribution to this field will come from the systematic disciplined research of the future.*

*In a concluding lecture to appear in a subsequent issue of the *Bulletin* the author will discuss individuality, education, national character, social change, and psychotherapy from the cross-cultural point of view.

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